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SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE TO SEND OBSERVERS TO MONITOR PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS; LOOKING TO ENGAGE IN OTHER WAYS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Arab League (AL) plans to send 70-80 election observers to Iraq for the January 2009 provincial elections, according to newly arrived AL Ambassador Hani Al-Khallaf. In a November 5 meeting with Ambassador Crocker, Al-Khallaf said that Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) has told him that an invitation for the AL to send observers will be issued shortly. Al-Khallaf noted that ensuring security for the observers would be an issue and requested Embassy/MNF-I assistance. Ambassador Crocker said the presence of observers from other Arab countries would be extremely valuable and would complement the presence of those from the U.S., Europe and elsewhere. He said the U.S. will encourage UNAMI to organize a meeting very shortly for all diplomatic missions and organizations that intend to send election observers in order to begin working on the specific modalities for coordinating efforts, logistics and security.

¶2. (C) On the importance of Arab engagement with Iraq more broadly, Ambassador Crocker congratulated Ambassador Khallaf for filling a long-standing vacancy (Note: Khallaf's predecessor, Ambassador Mokhtar Lemani, departed Baghdad in 2007 and, until Khallaf's arrival in August, the Arab League had been represented in Baghdad only at the Charge level. End Note.) His arrival -- along with the recent arrivals of Ambassadors from the UAE, Jordan, Bahrain and Kuwait -- has sent a positive signal of confidence in the future to Iraqis and to others throughout the region. Ambassador Crocker said that the AL and its constituent members could be especially helpful in encouraging Iraq's myriad ethnic and political factions to focus on national priorities rather than narrow agendas. Arab representatives often can be more effective than others and can offer "brotherly advice." Importantly, strong Arab engagement can counterbalance Iranian efforts to influence events in Iraq. Both Ambassadors agreed that the nature of Iraqi politics, the non-Cabinet relationship between the Council of Ministers and the Prime Minister, and other factors present unique challenges in this regard.

¶3. (C) Finally, Ambassador Khallaf signaled interest in helping bring those Iraqis currently outside the political process into it. He argued that there are individuals within certain groups who are willing to cooperate. We should, he argued, work to find alternatives for them and suggested sending some to universities "elsewhere in the free world." Ambassador Crocker responded that the U.S. could be supportive if individuals who truly want to cooperate can be identified and separated from the others. In this context, Ambassador Crocker noted that the GOI has its own mechanism -- the Implementation and Follow On Committee for National Reconciliation (IFCNR) -- and that the AL could look for ways to assist with its work. In the end, Ambassador Crocker noted, reconciliation among Iraq's various communities is the basis of our strategy and essential for Iraq's future peace and stability.

CROCKER